



# News Release

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## **Special Education Rules Rolled Out State Rules Effective Now**

Revisions to the state's special education administrative rules took effect last week, marking more than a year of Department of Education efforts to engage citizens about the need for changes.

As the final step toward implementation, the rules were filed with the state's Office of the Great Seal on June 6. Although the rules take immediate effect, school districts will be provided sufficient time to make necessary changes to forms and procedure, said Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Watkins.

The State Board of Education also supported the revised rules package with a unanimous vote at its February 2002 meeting.

"Parents, disability advocates, teachers, administrators, school board members, and legislators from both political parties were incensed. They were angry about the process of having only 30 days to comment on proposed rules that impacted people's livelihoods and the level of service to many of Michigan's most vulnerable children," Watkins said. "They saw the changes as Draconian in nature and perceived them to be a retreat from the high quality of service that made Michigan a leader in special education. We had to constantly remind everyone it was not about the rules – it was about our children.

The process implemented by the Department of Education over the last year created opportunities to listen to the impacted parties, hear their suggestions, which lessened their suspicions and started to build trust and collaboration, he said.

Public engagement of all the affected parties enabled the Department of Education to rewrite the rules to provide an appropriate level of service, a safety net for parents and children, and local flexibility for districts to develop alternative delivery models to meet local needs.

The rules package also received no administrative hearing with the Legislature's Joint Committee on Administrative Rules (JCAR), a huge accomplishment given the size of the revised administrative rules package.

Special education advocates praised the Department of Education and Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Watkins for its time and deliberation with the rules package.

"We were very concerned with how the rules process started under the previous administration, but we are extremely pleased with how things have come around under State Superintendent Tom Watkins' watch," said Eric Roberts, executive director of The Arc Michigan, a special education advocacy group. "Parents and students were included in the process as partners, and were not dictated to by the state."

Department staff conducted more than 45 public hearings and meetings across the state in 2001 discussing the special education rules revisions with the public. Watkins conducted an additional seven "Listen and Learn" gatherings around the state and met firsthand with thousands of concerned citizens.

State Senator Beverly S. Hammerstrom (R-Dearborn), JCAR chairwoman, also praised the Department of Education for its engagement of the public regarding the rules package.

"I would like to thank the Department (of Education) for slowing down this package of rules and giving parents and educators the opportunity to comment," Hammerstrom said. "JCAR has no reason to object to these vastly improved rules."

A copy of the rules in PDF format are available on the Department's web site, [www.michigan.gov/mde](http://www.michigan.gov/mde).